

Dear Environment Committee Chairs Sen. Lopes and Rep. Gresko, Vice-Chairs Sen. Hochadel and Rep. Palm, Ranking Members Sen. Harding and Rep. Callahan, and distinguished members of the Environment Committee:

I urge you to oppose SB-1148, a bill that would establish a lottery to hunt and kill Connecticut's black bears.

Black bears are a keystone species and a crucial part of Connecticut's biodiversity. Their foraging habits aid log decomposition and open the forest canopy to allow more growth of plant life. In this era of climate change, an important way that plant species migrate in response to a warming planet is in animals' stomachs, which helps plants shift their ranges and adapt. Large mammals, such as bears, play an important role in dispersing seeds in this way.

Hunting Does Not Solve Bear-Human Interaction Issues: Please oppose any efforts to hunt or trap bears. Black bears are shy animals that interact with humans primarily because of attractants such as garbage, bird feeders, compost piles, etc.

"It's not the bears that are a nuisance or a problem. It's that people are leaving food out for bears. Unless you address the cause, you're still going to have the problem."

– Richard Beausoleil, bear specialist, Washington State Department of Fish & Wildlife

- Hunting will only perpetuate a cycle of killing because the underlying cause (attractants) would still need to be addressed. People and communities need to be educated about bear behaviors and become "bear smart" – learning how to avoid attractants via unsecured trash, food smells, unintentional feeding, unsecured coops and bee hives, etc.
- Hunters most often do not kill bears involved in "nuisance" behavior – they are hunting bears deep in the woods, away from neighborhood areas where shooting firearms is unsafe.
- By hunting in the deep forest, bears that are foraging naturally on foods, such as nuts and berries, far away from "human territory" – would be the ones tragically killed.
- While mother bears forage for food, it's common for them to "tree" their cubs as much as 200 yards away, most likely unseen by hunters. If the mother is killed, the orphaned cubs would be left unprotected – putting them at risk of starvation, predation, exposure and death.

Additional Considerations:

- The number of reported bear sightings is much greater than their actual population because each bear may be spotted and reported numerous times.
- Serious threats already exist to black bears, including deaths due to vehicle collisions and poaching.
- State statute already gives the DEEP Commissioner the authority to kill a bear if there is a public health or safety threat.
- Bears are among the least reproducing mammals in North America and their populations are self-regulating. If a female bear does not attain sufficient body fat or weight during the summer and fall, the embryos will not develop.

Instead, please support the measures outlined in HB-5160: An Act Concerning the Habituation of Black Bears. This bill includes a comprehensive, proactive set of initiatives using non-lethal techniques to prevent the habituation of black bears. These measures would:

- Address in a non-lethal manner intentional and unintentional feeding of black bears
- Provide a grant program for communities to use non-lethal methods to avoid conflicts
- Establish rehabilitation guidelines for orphaned black bear cubs
- Put in place a funding mechanism to compensate for structural damages made by black bears on farms

Non-Lethal Strategies Work: In 2014, Yosemite National Park reported a 92% decrease in human/bear incidents due to public education programs. Over a span of three years in Nevada's Lake Tahoe area, public education and implementation of bear-proof dumpsters led to approximately 43% decrease in complaints over three years. Our neighbors to the north in the province of Ontario focused on prevention, education and awareness initiatives. The year before public education and bear-resistant containers were implemented, there were 500 human-bear conflicts – the year after implementation, conflicts dropped to 87.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration of this important issue.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathleen Magner
Connecticut